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[NASA Reverses Controversial Budget Cut](#)

Spirit escapes shutdown threat

Well, it seems that NASA 'did it again', so to say. Just recently the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, responsible for the Mars Exploration Rover program, was ordered to apply a budget cut of 4 million US dollars for the 2008 fiscal year. Yet another cut was scheduled for the 2009, totaling 8 million dollars of the budget for the rover program. However, NASA seems to have missed some details along the way. Upon the receiving of the letter from NASA announcing the budget cut, the JPL realized that, in order to keep the program alive, they would have to temporarily shutdown one of the two twin rovers, namely Spirit. NASA said that the intention was not to shutdown any of the two rovers and the JPL would have to find a way to keep them both alive with the existing budget. Since this is close to impossible, NASA decided to reverse the budget cut on the Mars Exploration Rover program, as shutting down one of the rovers was never an option. NASA spokesperson Dwayne Brown said soon after the reversal of the decision that "the NASA administrator has rescinded the letter." According to NASA, budget cuts were implemented on a number of missions, in order to make up for the Mars Science Laboratory project which has already overrun its fundings by over 200 million dollars. Mars Science Laboratory plans to put a much powerful rover on the Red Planet, in order to replace the old Spirit and Opportunity rovers. Mars Science Laboratory mission is scheduled for launch into space somewhere around September 2009. "We're back to the drawing board. They're going to have to sit down and see what other options within the Mars program are viable," said Brown. Although the two rovers have exceeded their life span more than 16 times and are suffering from multiple mechanical and software malfunctions, they are still able to make good science. NASA's backing down from the Mars Exploration Rover program would have been understandable if it had been the case, but it seems that shutting down the rovers would be the last thing they would do in order to fund the Mars Science Laboratory. **Justified operating costs** Spirit is set to hibernate in the region of the Home Plate plateau during the northern winter, due to low light intensity corroborated with dirty solar panels, which cannot provide with enough energy to power it for the time being. Opportunity, on the other hand, is located in the southern hemisphere and gets plenty of sunlight. Dust has crippled one of its infrared light spectrometers, but it is equipped with other such tools to analyze rock composition in detail. Spirit is no longer able to grind rock with its tool, but it can still brush rocks, which is just enough to remove unnecessary dust to make accurate measurements. Although it remains immobile for the winter, Spirit will still conduct investigations on Mars' surface. "There was an 800 million dollar investment just to get them to the planet. We now can operate both full-blast for 20 million dollars a year. I feel that the amount of science that we're getting from these vehicles easily justifies the amount being spent," said Cornell University principal investigator for the Mars Exploration Rover program Steve Squyres.